

Commissioner Comments by Dave Schulz

This is the first letter I have written for some time. It is easy to get overwhelmed with the job of Commissioner today. Land use, roads, nursing homes, federal and state agency issues among so many other things make my job interesting and yet seem to consume so many hours. Recently, I was asked if there was a job description for County Commissioner. Frankly, I don't think this column has room for all the various things we involve in. Probably my wife is the best person to assess the extent of my duties. Once in a while she will put a note in my lunch box suggesting we have a date. I know then I have been on the road too much.

If you have been in the Court House recently, you will have observed the results of the restoration project. Wiring (electrical, telephone, computer), total window re-construction (using the original glass), fresh paint (inside and out), lighting and new carpet all combined to make your Court House the most impressive and yet oldest Court House in the State. Our thanks to all who were patient and curious during the construction. The public was tremendous considering the inconvenience and often cluttered office environments. Also, we are so appreciative of the entire staff for working those months throughout the process in often temporary, dusty, noisy conditions. One office had to be closed for one day throughout the entire project. Otherwise, as best possible, it was business as usual. We are planning an open house in the near future to show the building off and express our gratitude to everyone involved, including you the taxpayer.

Also, we have been working with the MSU School of Architecture to develop a conceptual example of an annex to the present Court House. County Government is being required to grow. Madison County is growing in population and development. With that growth, more demands are placed on all County departments. As many of you know, offices are scattered throughout several buildings in Virginia City. Further as many of you know, certain demands for improved jail environment will mandate we upgrade that facility. And, we are obligated to provide safe access to the upper levels of the Court House by complying with the Americans Disabilities Act. The conceptual plans provide a jail facility which will meet today's standards, elevator access to the upper levels, and office and conference room space to more adequately, and in one complex, serve the needs of our growing County. We appreciate your input and questions on this very preliminary proposal.

During the last several years we have been involved in both the Forest and BLM Management Plan revisions. Your interest in and input toward the revisions is important. One of my concerns regards the Forest Service proposing the Snowcrest Range in the Upper Ruby as recommended Wilderness. People who are aware of this mountain range and who have used it will lose road access through closures, will no longer camp in many of their favorite places because of the same reason, and will have to watch the tree color continue to turn red due to insects and disease without any way to manage it. The Upper Ruby currently is a favorite spot for thousands of hunters, backpackers, sightseers, campers, etc. Restricting the Snowcrests as proposed in the Plan alternative will pressure the east side of the Ruby drainage by concentrating use to a greater extent. Further, management decisions on the Snowcrests will be minimized by the wilderness status. Hence, forest health management decisions are inconsequential. So, my question is: Is smoke a better alternative than sawdust? I wonder!!

Regarding our County Nursing Homes, we recently hired Jim Clavadetscher as Administrator/MDS Coordinator of the Madison Valley Manor. Jim currently travels for the State of Montana as a surveyor of health care facilities. Jim begins October 24th, so please stop by and get acquainted. We are very encouraged by the census at the MVM which is at 33 residents. This is the highest number in three years. In Sheridan, the census is currently 36. We are equally encouraged by this residency as well. The County is cooperating with the Sheridan Hospital to hire a joint Administrator for those facilities. During the last two weeks we have interviewed a number of very qualified candidates and expect to make a decision in the near future. I am encouraged this relationship between the TRMCC and the hospital opens us both to other opportunities, as well. We appreciate Gloria Eckerle, Interim Administrator, for managing both County facilities through this transition time.

My last topic today is roads. We always hear about roads, potholes and the like. We Commissioners always try to respond to concerns while still trying to maintain a routine of management throughout the respective road districts. But, today, I prefer to address something about roads that impacts more and more of us each day. That is: the conflict of roads (County and State), automobiles and wildlife. Personally, I never hit a deer until I was 40 years old. Since then, in the last 14 years, my wife or I have hit and killed 14 deer. I promise, this occurred not by my liking. I am going to say that at the rate we Montanans are hitting and/or killing deer on the highways in Madison County I am not surprised if that number is as great, or greater than the count taken during hunting season. Then we must look at human life, at insurance rate increases, and at the loss of the vehicle while it is being repaired or replaced. What can we do? Limit roadside game preserves, refrain from growing corn or sunflowers 100 yards from a highway, open an early season before cattle come home from summer range, fence the roads like Canada does? This issue is happening County wide! We appreciate your thought, ideas and observations. I am not a hunter, but I seem to have gotten my quota!!

Have a great Fall!!